

THE GRAPEVINE

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Dear Friends,

"Are these peaches really good?" The question was asked in front of the Sweet Dreams, grown-in-Yakima peaches. "Yes, these peaches are really good," I replied. "No, I mean are they really good EATING peaches?" the customer asked. "Well, this is a really good variety. Maybe you've never seen it before, but it's a low acid, yellow flesh peach with great, sweet flavor. It's a freestone, as well."

"Have you eaten them?" the customer pressed on. "Yes," I said. "In fact, I made a pie with them, and it was really good."

"But when do the REALLY good peaches come in?" I realized I was beaten, threw in the towel and said, "In August."

"I knew it!" said the customer, and our conversation turned to the peaches he'd helped can with his mother during the Eisenhower administration. Now, I realize my Snark Quotient is pretty high right there, so let me add this disclaimer: I too, have lovely food memories from the Eisenhower administration; unfortunately they revolve around penny candy from Hilldale's corner store, and the black cherry ice cream cones from the Dairy Bar, both in Sedro-Woolley.

You should hear me at an ice cream shop. "Is this black cherry ice cream really good? I mean REALLY good?" There's just no way to triumph against someone's precious food memories.

When I told the customer that the "really good eating peaches" arrived in August, I knew he was probably thinking about older varieties that descend from the Hale family of peaches, or the Elberta family of peaches. If there's some confusion about "eating" variety peaches, I've yet to find a peach that wasn't a good "eating" peach, though people often think "canning" peaches and "eating" peaches are distinctly different in deliciousness. Answer: no. "Canning" peaches are just called that because the pit pops easily out of the fruit.

Besides peaches, what are the local gustatorial possibilities in August? Practically endless! Do you like blueberries, apricots, melons and nectarines? Got 'em in August! Do you like corn roasted in the campfire coals, broccoli in a salad, beans, tomatoes sandwiched between leaves of basil and fresh mozzarella? Okra battered and deep fried to crispy perfection? Do all that in August!

Month #8 brings us just a hint of next season with new crop, grown in Washington apples and pears, two quintessentially---hate to say it---"fall" favorites. When you see those special tart, juicy, flavorful apples called Gravensteins, snatch them up! Don't hesitate, because their season is very short. They make pie that's out of this world.

We'll have local plums and pluots (the plum/apricot cross), cucumbers, potatoes, eggplant and peppers, and summer squashes in several varieties, all in August. Maybe Concord grapes as well, and heirloom and Roma tomato varieties along with beefsteaks. Green beefsteaks snuck into the market on the 25th of July, indicating that the crop was sized up nicely, and ready to color up soon.

August is a busy month for people who like to do home canning, and we'll have box prices for you on anything you want, when you buy it by the box. Big family reunion, and you need a box of onions or a bushel of peppers? Ask us for the box price, we'll hook you up!

Hardly anything is sold by the "bushel" these days, but oddly enough, peppers often come in a cardboard box marked "3/4 bushel." Even that old tongue-twister "pick a peck of pickled peppers" alludes to the bushel system, because a peck is a quarter bushel. Did anybody ever say to you, "I love you a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck?" It means that they love you a lot, and they're fond of old-timey phrases.

All this is by way of telling you that "box prices" refer to specific quantities in the box. Sometimes it's "eaches," like 72 oranges in a box, or 6 half pint cups to the half flat; sometimes it's a specific weight. In the case of produce that's packed in the field or orchard, we'll weigh the box at the checkout to make sure you're getting the stated weight in the box. Please don't panic if you see us removing or adding fruit to your box. We're just making sure the weight is correct.

We have some important holidays to celebrate this month. Home gardeners will appreciate August 8, it's Leave Zucchini On Your Neighbor's Front Porch Day. Washington Federal bank in downtown Bothell has been celebrating that holiday for the last several weeks, with a nice basket of huge zucchini's free for the taking by the door. I meant to chide Claudia, the branch manager for unfair competition with the fruit market!

Celebrate August 24 by making a peach pie, since it's National Peach Pie Day. Use some of our eating peaches! We know they're really good, because we get to eat them before you do! Do you know how to ripen fruit at home? Simply leave it on the kitchen counter for a few days until it's ripe, then refrigerate. For boxed fruit that you want to can, just leave it in the box, keep it at room temperature, cover it, and wait a few days until fruit is the desired ripeness.

We'll be open over the Labor Day weekend, including Labor Day itself, Monday September 2, so please celebrate that one with us, too!

I hope we'll have our website hosed off and back up this month, but you can find us on Facebook, which is a good spot for photos and produce updates a couple times a week, and we're continuing with our Twitter tweets. Our blog can be found at Freshpickednews.blogspot.com, and for need-to-know-now questions, call us! 425 486 6888.

It's not necessary to do a marathon pickling session complete with steamy canning fol-de-rol. If you have refrigerator space, you can do 'ridge pickles. Here's my mother-in-law Jane's Quick Crock Pickle Brine: 5 cups water, 1 cup white vinegar, 1/2 cup pickling salt, fresh dill, peeled garlic, pickling spice, hot peppers, pickling cucumbers. Combine water, vinegar, salt in a saucepan and cook, stirring until mixture comes to a boil and salt is dissolved.

I make the pickles right in the quart jar, and store in the refrigerator. Just add your spice, garlic and dill to the washed cukes in the jar, pour the brine over, let come to room temp, cap and refrigerate. It takes about 1 1/2 lbs. pickling cukes per quart, and around 2-2 1/2 cups of brine per quart. I add 1 teaspoon spice, 1 clove garlic, 2-3 heads of dill and half a hot pepper per jar. Make sure the cucumbers are completely submerged in the brine or you could get spoilage, even under refrigeration.

Someone asked me if our signs about "no pets allowed" were serious, because they didn't know that dogs, and, yes, truly, miniature horses are the only animals allowed as service animals in retail establishments. We all love pets here, but they're not allowed in King County food stores, and service animals are not allowed in shopping carts or hand baskets. I have yet to see our first miniature service horse, but I very much look forward to it, no snark intended. Have a great August, and don't give up on September. I call it our "secret summer."

Fruitfully Yours,

Karin

KARIN POAGE

GRAPEVINE BACKPAGE

SAVORY BLUEBERRY PIZZA

---Recipe from the Stanwood-Camano Fair, which runs August 2,3,4 this year.

1 lb. pizza dough
1 1/2 cups grated mozzarella cheese, divided
1/2 cup crumbled gorgonzola cheese
4 oz. diced pancetta (or bacon or ham, if pancetta is unavailable), cooked and drained
1/4 cup thinly sliced red onion
1 cup fresh blueberries
1/4 cup thinly sliced fresh basil
freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 450. Lightly flour a work surface. Pat and stretch dough into a 10x 14" oval, place on large baking sheet. With a fork, prick dough in several places. Leaving a 1-inch border, sprinkle dough with half the mozzarella, the gorgonzola, pancetta and red onion. Bake until crust is golden brown, 12-14 minutes. Sprinkle blueberries and remaining mozzarella over pizza, bake until cheese is melted and crust is golden brown, about 2 minutes longer. Remove from oven, top with basil and pepper.

LEBANESE SWEET RED PEPPER DIP

---Recipe from Mideastfeast.com. Serve with sliced raw veggies or pita chips.

3 medium red bell peppers, stems and seeds removed
1 medium chopped sweet onion
1/2 cup whole wheat bread crumbs
3/4 cup crushed walnuts
1 1/2 tablespoons chili powder
1/4 teaspoon cumin
2-3 tablespoons water

Oven 350. On a lightly greased baking sheet, place peppers and roast about 12 minutes, turning occasionally. Remove, cover and set aside. When peppers are cool, peel and discard skin. Set aside.

In a small skillet with a scant amount of olive oil, sauté onion until translucent, about 5 minutes. Set aside.

In food processor, puree bread crumbs and water, gradually adding just enough water to make a paste. Add onion, pepper and oil and blend until consistency is even and "dippy."

BROCCOLI BLAST

---People in the local Weight Watchers community know Claudia, a long time group leader, who's bursting with enthusiasm and great ideas. Here's one of her favorites.

1 bunch broccoli crowns, cut into florets
1 clove minced garlic
1 tablespoon olive oil
Toss ingredients to coat, roast at 450 for 10 minutes. Enjoy hot or cold---snackacular!

SPINACH SALAD WITH YOGURT DRESSING

---Recipe from Yami Yogurt.

1/2 cup plain, lowfat yogurt
1/4 cup fresh raspberries (if frozen, thaw before using)
1 tablespoon skim milk
1 1/2 teaspoon fresh chopped mint
4-6 cups fresh spinach leaves
2 sliced white or crimini mushrooms
1 tablespoon toasted sesame seeds
4-6 red onion rings
6 slices bacon, cooked till crisp and crumbled
1 hard boiled egg, sliced
1/2 cup croutons

Combine yogurt, raspberries, milk and mint in a bowl, set aside. Wash spinach and pat dry. Toss with sliced mushrooms, sesame seeds in a large bowl, and divide evenly over two salad plates. Top with onion rings. Drizzle dressing over greens and sprinkle with crumbled bacon. Garnish with sliced egg and croutons. Serves 2.

WATERMELON MARGARITAS

---Recipe from Hornitos Tequila, serves 5.

5 cups seeded watermelon, cut into 1" chunks
1 cup Hornitos tequila
1/2 cup fresh lime juice
1/4 cup granulated sugar
mint leaves for garnish

Freeze melon chunks at least 3 hours. Combine all ingredients and process in a blender or food processor until smooth. Serve immediately, garnish with mint leaves if desired.

ANSWER: the Washington State Fair (the "Puyallup" fair), running from September 6-22 this year, attended by over 1 million people. WASHINGTON TRIVIA: What is the single largest attraction held annually in Washington?